

Revival of Traditional Bahraini Architecture: Public Perceptions and their Impact on Contemporary Projects

Sara Husain Jawad Allaith

University of Bahrain, Bahrain

Emails: 202108299@stu.uob.edu.bh; SaraAllaith26@gmail.com

Received	Accepted	Published
04.06.2025	25.09.2025	30.09.2025

<https://doi.org/10.61275/ISVSej-2025-12-05-08>

Abstract

The revival of traditional Bahraini architecture reflects a significant shift in public perception and architectural practice. This research focuses on understanding how traditional architectural elements are currently perceived, appreciated, and incorporated into modern Bahraini design. It examines cultural, environmental, and social influences that contribute to this shift. The central research issue addresses the declining presence of traditional architectural identity and the emerging movement towards its revival and integration within contemporary architecture.

This research adopts a mixed-methods qualitative approach. Data is collected through two focus group discussions with young and older Bahraini residents, site visits and photographic surveys of key areas like Muharraq and Manama, and an online questionnaire completed by 64 respondents. The methods ensure triangulated insights into the social, functional, and symbolic dimensions of traditional Bahraini architecture. Data is analyzed thematically to understand generational preferences, symbolic associations, and public interaction with traditional spaces.

Findings reveal a strong inter-generational appreciation for traditional architecture, albeit for different reasons. While older generations emphasize cultural memory and comfort, younger individuals associate it with sustainability and identity. Participants widely support the integration of traditional features into modern designs. The paper concludes that traditional architecture in Bahrain is undergoing a revival, driven by both nostalgic values and contemporary relevance.

Keywords: Traditional Bahraini architecture, Public perceptions, Sustainability, Cultural identity, Heritage, Revival.

Introduction

In Bahrain, architectural evolution mirrors broader societal transitions and reflects the shifting priorities of its people. During the mid-20th century, the country experienced rapid modernization, leading to the introduction of Western architectural styles. These styles, characterized by large villas, glass facades, and foreign materials have become symbols of affluence and national progress. As a result, traditional Bahraini architecture—characterized by

wind towers, courtyards, mashrabiya, and passive cooling features—is widely perceived as outdated and impractical in a modernizing world. This perception causes a decline in the maintenance and construction of such traditional forms, sidelining architectural identity rooted in the climate, culture and community of Bahrain.

In recent years, however, this trend has begun to shift. Indeed, there is a growing awareness of the cultural and environmental values inherent in traditional architecture. Government-led initiatives, cultural revival movements, and increased academic interest has led to a renewed focus on preservation and adaptation. In this context, projects in Muharraq, Al Jasra, and new developments such as Al Liwan demonstrate a conscious effort to reintroduce traditional elements into the modern built environment. Younger generations also contribute to this revival, often using social media platforms to celebrate traditional designs and calling attention to neglected historic buildings.

This research investigates this architectural resurgence, focusing on evolving public perceptions and its influence on contemporary design practices. It explores how architectural heritage continues to resonate with identity, climate, sustainability, and national pride. The study also assesses how traditional architectural elements are being thoughtfully incorporated into contemporary Bahraini architecture—not just as stylistic embellishments, but as meaningful responses to environmental, cultural, and functional demands. The aim is to understand the transformation of traditional Bahraini architecture from a relic of the past into a living and evolving component of national identity and urban design. Its objectives are as follows.

- To examine the factors contributing to the renewed appreciation of traditional Bahraini architecture.
- To explore the integration of traditional architectural elements into contemporary designs.
- To trace the historical evolution of Bahraini architecture and its transformation over time.
- To identify the key drivers behind the shift in public perception of traditional architecture.
- To assess the role of government policies, cultural movements, and sustainability efforts in shaping architectural trends.
- To analyze contemporary Bahraini buildings that successfully incorporate traditional architectural features.
- To provide insights into the future direction of Bahraini architecture and the potential for blending heritage with modernity.

Theoretical background

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in vernacular architecture theory, place-identity, cultural continuity, and architectural semiotics. In this connection, Rapoport (1969) asserts that vernacular architecture emerges from the way of life of the society, shaped by cultural, environmental, and social factors. Bahraini courtyard houses embody these traits through inward orientation, shaded passages, and passive cooling systems, reflecting both climate adaptation and cultural values. Similarly, Oliver (1987) emphasizes that vernacular structures are cultural archives that convey collective memories and identity through materiality and spatial organization.

Proshansky et al. (1983) introduce the concept of place-identity, suggesting that people develop a sense of self through the spaces they inhabit. This helps explain the emotional bonds Bahrainis express toward traditional architectural forms. Adding to this, Eco (1976) presents architectural semiotics which frames buildings as symbolic texts; In fact, when this is applied to the reappearance of wind towers or mashrabiya in new buildings, they can be read as cultural signifiers amidst globalized urban environments. Together, these frameworks explain how traditional Bahraini architecture operates as a living narrative of identity, sustainability, and memory—one that continues to shape and be shaped by evolving societal values.

Review of Literature

Research on Bahraini architecture extensively explores the shifts brought about by modernization and the subsequent decline of vernacular forms. Fakharany (2025) notes that the oil boom introduces Western aesthetics into Bahraini cities, promoting perceptions of progress that marginalize traditional architecture. These imported modernist designs, often promoted through state-led development projects, displace architectural elements rooted in climate, culture, and social norms, pushing aside traditional Bahraini spatial values.

Hamousch (2007) builds on this by highlighting a regional response to globalization, where architects across the Gulf work to reintegrate traditional forms within modern frameworks. In Bahrain, this tension becomes apparent in the effort to reconcile heritage with innovation. In fact, Hamousch argues that the transformation of Gulf cities reflects a growing resistance to the homogeneity of global urban design, fostering efforts to preserve cultural specificity and identity through architectural practices.

Simultaneously, Lombard (2024) examines the role of cultural heritage campaigns and the institutional drive to promote traditional identity through tourism and education. He critiques these initiatives as often symbolic, pointing out that traditional architecture in Bahrain is not consistently embedded within the modern developments. However, Lombard identifies a trend among the youth who re-engage with heritage spaces through social media, creating new forms of digital cultural memory. This informal engagement plays a key role in maintaining relevance for traditional spaces among the younger generations.

Interestingly, the Ministry of Housing (1999) documents the environmental adaptability and spatial logic of vernacular housing in its studies. It details features such as wind towers, internal courtyards, and shaded walkways as essential components of microclimatic comfort. Despite these advantages, the policy direction during the late 20th century favors modern housing typologies, revealing a mismatch between appreciation and implementation. This contradiction highlights the challenges of translating theoretical support into practical architectural and urban planning strategies.

These studies collectively reveal a gap in the literature concerning the reinterpretation of traditional forms in contemporary Bahraini architecture. While their symbolic and nostalgic values are well acknowledged, limited attention is given to how traditional forms function in the present-day contexts, especially in terms of aesthetics, sustainability, and public interaction. Furthermore, empirical research combining architectural theory with community perception remains limited—an area this study aims to address through direct engagement with public opinions and physical observations.

This research bridges that gap by analyzing recent developments—such as Al Liwan and the RAK Art Foundation—that selectively incorporate traditional architectural language. These examples showcase how modern design in Bahrain increasingly adopts heritage elements not just decoratively, but with cultural intent and environmental function. The RAK Art Foundation, in particular, demonstrates how the coexistence of modern interiors and traditional exteriors communicates a layered cultural message, bridging history with innovation.

In addition, the younger generation's digital engagement with traditional spaces introduces a new dimension to architectural revival. Through photography, online platforms, and artistic interventions such as graffiti on abandoned houses, youth reinterpret heritage in ways that reflect evolving identity and creative expression. These grassroots activities form part of a broader movement to preserve culture through lived and visual practices, even in the absence of formal restoration or state support.

Spatial integration of traditional elements into the broader urban environment also emerges as an essential focus in many studies. In Muharraq, for instance, preservation and community engagement align through initiatives like Muharraq Nights, where architecture becomes a stage for cultural events. These cases highlight how preserved buildings become functional and symbolic anchors for community identity. This evolving function of traditional architecture, as both physical and social infrastructure, is not widely discussed in the literature, which often presents tradition as being static rather than adaptive.

Overall, the reviewed literature offers a nuanced understanding of the forces shaping the architectural trajectory of Bahrain. It emphasizes how tradition, rather than fading, continues to adapt and re-emerge in new forms across physical, symbolic, and virtual realms. However, it also underlines the need for deeper empirical inquiry into how these developments resonate with the public and how architectural heritage is being actively integrated into contemporary life. This study responds to that need by grounding theoretical discourse in public opinion, visual analysis, and site-specific observations, contributing new insight into the lived experience of architectural heritage in Bahrain.

Research Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology structured around three main methods: focus group interviews, visual analysis through photographic survey and site observations, and an online questionnaire. These approaches were chosen to ensure a comprehensive, triangulated understanding of public perceptions and cultural engagements with traditional Bahraini architecture.

Two semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted. The first group included participants aged 20–40, including university students and young professionals. The second group consisted of residents aged 50 and above, many of whom had direct experience living in traditional neighborhoods. Each session included 4–6 participants selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in gender, education level, and neighborhood type. Discussions focused on perceptions of traditional versus modern architecture, emotional and cultural attachments to architectural forms, and aspirations for future design. Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis followed to identify shared values, generational differences, and recurring motifs in participant responses. These conversations yielded insights into the symbolic significance of traditional features such as courtyards, wind towers, and decorative screens.

Field observations and a photographic survey were conducted across several key urban areas: the Manama Souq district, Muharraq, Al Jasra House, the RAK Art Foundation, and Al Liwan. Observations followed a structured template noting time, environmental conditions, types of engagement (e.g., sitting, walking, photographing), and specific architectural features such as wind towers, mashrabiya, and courtyards. These surveys were conducted at various times of the day and during both weekdays and weekends to capture differences in public use and engagement. Each site visit also documented how people responded to restored versus deteriorating architectural elements, providing qualitative insight into public behavior and aesthetic judgment. Visual data were recorded using photographs, which served both analytical and illustrative purposes, allowing for a comparative study of how heritage had been preserved, adapted, or neglected across different sites.

The online questionnaire targeted a broader public demographic. It was implemented through Google Forms and distributed via social media and community networks. A total of 64 participants completed the survey, ranging from ages 15 to 60+. The survey consisted of closed and multiple-choice questions focusing on architectural preferences, valued features of traditional architecture, associations with traditions (comfort, heritage, sustainability, outdatedness), and support for integrating traditional elements into modern buildings. Convenience and snowball sampling techniques were used. Respondents were asked to give consent at the beginning of the questionnaire. The responses were then analyzed to determine the trends in perception and demographic variances. Data were organized by age group, gender, and occupation to identify patterns in preference and cultural association with architectural features.

Each method was designed to complement the others. The focus groups provided rich, in-depth insights into generational attitudes and emotional connections. The site observations and photographic survey grounded these perceptions in spatial and environmental reality, revealing how people interacted with architectural features in lived space. The questionnaire offered broader statistical insights, enabling the validation of focus group and observational

findings across a more representative sample. The triangulation of data allowed for cross-verification, ensuring a more holistic and accurate interpretation of results.

Together, these methods produced a robust and layered dataset. The qualitative nature of the research allowed for deep exploration of meaning and sentiment, while the combination of structured and unstructured tools ensured both consistency and flexibility. Through these methods, it was possible to explore not only what participants thought, but also how they behaved in real architectural contexts. Importantly, this methodology enabled the research to account for both subjective interpretations and observable interactions, thus achieving a balanced view of how traditional architecture was understood and experienced in the contemporary Bahraini society. The integrated methodology was critical in linking theory to practice, as it bridged perceptions with spatial behavior and cultural symbolism. The study ultimately benefited from the convergence of multiple data types—textual, visual, behavioral—which together enriched the analysis and gave voice to the relationship of the community with its architectural heritage.

Findings

The findings of this research are organized into three major data sources: focus group discussions, photographic and site surveys, and the online public questionnaire. These data collectively provide a comprehensive view of public sentiment, observed behavior, and environmental context regarding traditional Bahraini architecture.

Focus Group Results

The focus group discussions, conducted with two generational cohorts, reveal both shared and contrasting perceptions of traditional architecture.

Among the younger participants (ages 20–40), traditional Bahraini architecture is appreciated for its cultural symbolism and aesthetics. Courtyards, wind towers, and mashrabiya are frequently mentioned as intelligent and beautiful solutions adapted to the climate of Bahrain. Several participants referred to how social media platforms elevate appreciation of such features, stating that “posts about old buildings always get attention” and that “there’s something comforting and smart about their design.” Despite this admiration, the younger group highlights practical concerns, such as the lack of insulation or modern amenities in older buildings. One respondent explains, “I love the look, but I wouldn’t live in one without air conditioning.”

In contrast, the older cohort (ages 50+) brings lived experience to their responses. Participants recall the comfort of traditional houses before air conditioning became widespread, citing the passive cooling effects of courtyards and thick walls. One noted, “We didn’t need machines; our houses did the work.” Emotional and cultural attachment to traditional housing is strong among this group, with many associating it with family cohesion, community closeness, and a simpler lifestyle. However, they also acknowledge the financial and physical burden of maintaining such houses today.

Both groups agree that traditional elements should not be abandoned but adapted to the modern needs. There is consensus that new buildings can successfully blend heritage with modern living if designed thoughtfully. This is seen as a way to protect cultural identity while responding to the present-day comfort standards.

Photographic Survey and Site Observation

Photographic surveys and site observations further support the qualitative insights from the focus groups. The site visits encompass a range of urban conditions and architectural preservation levels.



Fig. 1: Old buildings
Source: Author



Fig. 2: Tourists Enjoying
Source: Author



Fig. 3: Praying in Public
Source: Author



Fig. 4: Modern facades
Source: Author



Fig. 5: Kanoo Museum
Source: Author

Manama

The photographic survey of Manama revealed dynamic interactions between people, architecture, and cultural practices. During the Friday Jamaa prayers, for example, many people were seen praying on sidewalks and roadside areas, illustrating how religious rituals spill into public urban spaces when dedicated infrastructure is lacking (Fig.3). Tourists were observed photographing a well-known Matam (a religious meeting place) (Fig. 2), indicating the cultural and historical value that such religious buildings continue to hold. Architecturally, Manama displays a striking contrast between modern commercial buildings and neglected vernacular houses (Fig. 1). While glass-fronted high-rises dominate the skyline, many traditional houses featuring coral stone, wooden screens, and shaded courtyards show signs of serious decay and abandonment. In contrast, the Kanoo Museum building (Fig. 5) offers a successful example of heritage preservation, as it is being carefully restored with full respect for its traditional architectural elements.

It is undeniable that this juxtaposition highlights both the potential and the challenges of maintaining the architectural identity of Bahrain in a rapidly modernizing context.



Fig. 6: Trees
Source: author)



Fig. 7: Source: author



Fig. 8: Arches
Source: author



Fig. 9: Arches
Source: author



Fig. 10: Well-maintained
Source: author



Fig. 11: New Additions.
Source: author

Muharraq

The photographic survey of Muharraq revealed a notable contrast to Manama, both in terms of public behavior and the condition of the built environment. Unlike Manama, where many traditional houses are left neglected, Muharraq shows clear signs of investment in the preservation and celebration of architectural heritage. There, the traditional houses and market structures are well-maintained (Fig. 10), with several undergoing active restoration or careful reconstruction using original materials and techniques. Public spaces, such as alleyways and courtyards (Fig. 6), were observed to be clean, accessible, and regularly used by the residents and visitors alike.

In fact, the success of cultural events like ‘Muharraq Nights’ reflects this renewed engagement with the historical identity of the city —drawing large crowds and revitalizing the local economy by transforming the preserved spaces into cultural destinations. This proactive approach to heritage has not only improved the physical environment but has also influenced public behavior, fostering a deeper appreciation for traditional architecture and its role in community life.



Fig. 12: Traditional Houses
Source: author



Fig. 13: Traditional Houses
Source: author



Fig. 14: RAK Art Foundation
Source: author



Fig. 15: RAK Art Foundation
Source: author



Fig. 16: Al Jasra House
Source: author

Other areas

The photographic survey of additional areas beyond Manama and Muharraq, such as Al Jasra House (Fig. 16), RAK Art Foundation (Fig. 14 & 15), and Al Liwan (Fig. 13), revealed diverse approaches to preserving and reinterpreting traditional Bahraini architecture. At Al Jasra House, the entire compound has been carefully maintained, with periodic restoration ensuring the site remains structurally sound and visually authentic. Open to visitors, the space serves as both a cultural exhibit and a living example of how heritage can be actively preserved. Similarly, the RAK Art Foundation showcases a thoughtful blend of tradition and modernity. While the building's exterior adheres to the classic Bahraini style—complete with traditional materials and proportions—the interior is distinctly modern. The balance is especially apparent in the central courtyard, where a striking metal cube installation stands out as a contemporary statement that does not overpower the surrounding traditional architecture, creating a respectful dialogue between past and present.

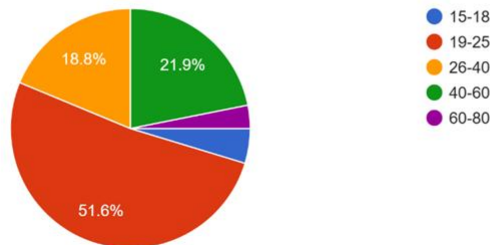
At Al Liwan, contemporary development draws directly from vernacular design logic. The use of narrow alleyways, internal courtyards, and shaded walkways demonstrates a commitment to preserving the spatial rhythm and environmental responsiveness of traditional Bahraini towns. Notably, even abandoned traditional homes (Fig. 12) are finding new meaning, particularly among Bahraini youth. One such house, despite its broken structure, has become a canvas for graffiti art, transforming neglect into expression. The layering of street art over the weathered façade suggests a new kind of cultural reclamation, where younger generations engage with the past creatively rather than passively. These observations collectively highlight how traditional architecture continues to evolve—not just through formal restoration but through reinterpretation and active cultural participation.

Questionnaire Data Summary

A total of 64 responses were collected through the online questionnaire. Respondents ranged in age from 15 to 60+, with participation from students, professionals, and retirees.

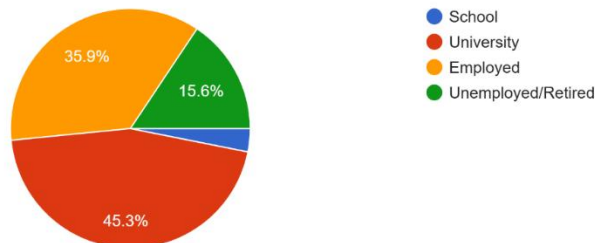
Age group
64 responses

Chart 1. Age group responses



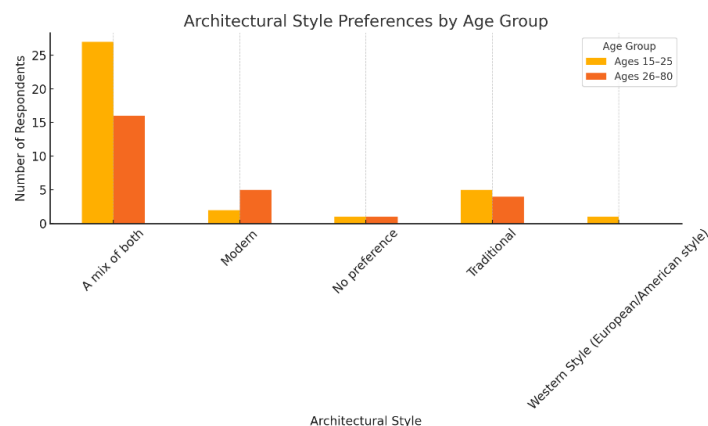
Occupation
64 responses

Chart 2. Occupation responses



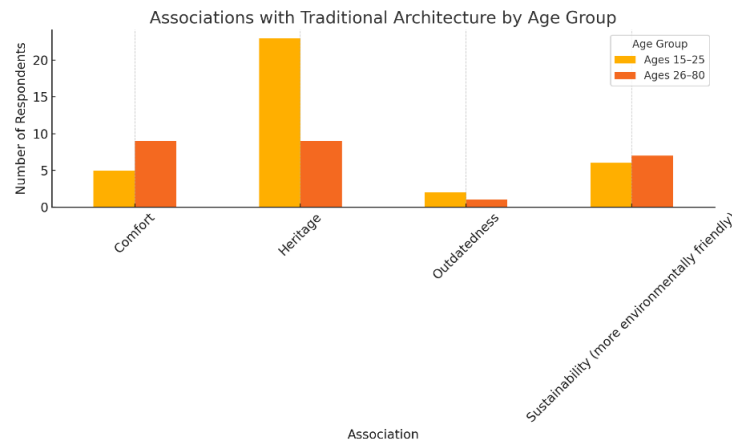
When asked about preferred architectural styles, the majority of participants chose a hybrid approach—combining traditional and modern styles. This preference was especially strong among younger respondents (15–25), 27 of whom selected this option. Older participants (26–80) also leaned toward hybrid styles, though more were open to fully modern buildings. Only a small number across all age groups preferred Western or purely imported designs.

Chart 3. Architectural Preferences by Age Group



On architectural features, courtyards received the highest approval across age groups, followed by shaded walkways and mashrabiya. Younger participants showed particular interest in wind towers as sustainable cooling systems, reflecting growing environmental awareness. Older respondents associated courtyards and thick-walled rooms with comfort and climate adaptability.

Chart 4. Associations with Traditional Architecture

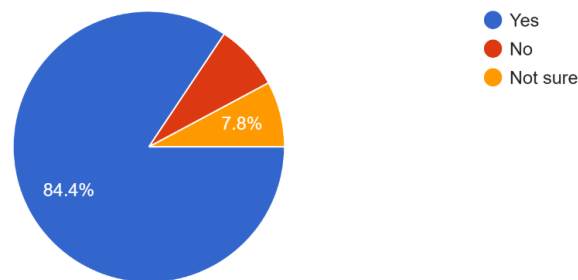


When asked to associate words with traditional architecture, 23 younger participants selected “heritage,” while older participants distributed responses more evenly across “heritage,” “comfort,” and “sustainability.” “Outdatedness” received very few responses, indicating a shift in perception—tradition is no longer viewed as incompatible with modernity.

Chart 5. Integration of traditional elements into modern building

Do you think traditional elements should be integrated into modern buildings?

64 responses



Another key finding is that 84.4% of participants support the integration of traditional elements into new buildings. This supports the conclusions drawn from interviews and observations, showing broad societal endorsement for a design approach that respects heritage while addressing modern needs.

Synthesis of Data

All data sources point to a clear revival of appreciation for traditional Bahraini architecture. The reasons vary: ranging from climate responsiveness to emotional attachment. Both younger and older Bahrainis see value in preserving and adapting traditional design. Focus groups and survey responses favore hybrid models that merge the symbolic, functional, and aesthetic strengths of vernacular forms with modern materials and systems.

The photographic survey reinforces these preferences through visual and behavioral evidence. Spaces that integrate traditional design in a meaningful way—such as Al Liwan and Muharraq’s restored neighborhoods—generate higher levels of public interaction and appreciation. Meanwhile, deteriorating structures still serve as cultural symbols, especially when reappropriated through youth expression.

The findings show that traditional architecture in Bahrain is not simply remembered. It is lived, reinterpreted, and increasingly demanded. The revival is driven by cultural pride, environmental awareness, and a desire for identity in a rapidly modernizing landscape.

Chart 6. Most appealing traditional feature

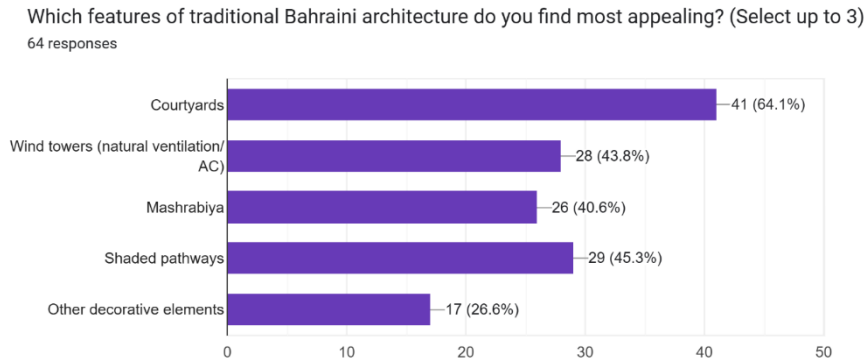
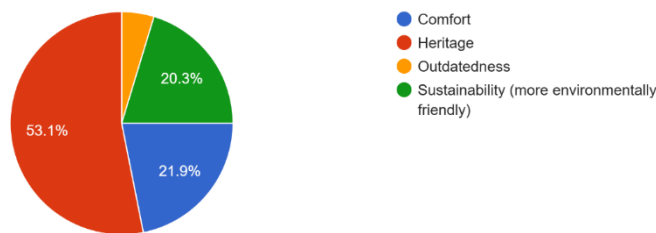


Chart 7. Association of traditional architecture

What do you associate most with traditional architecture?

64 responses

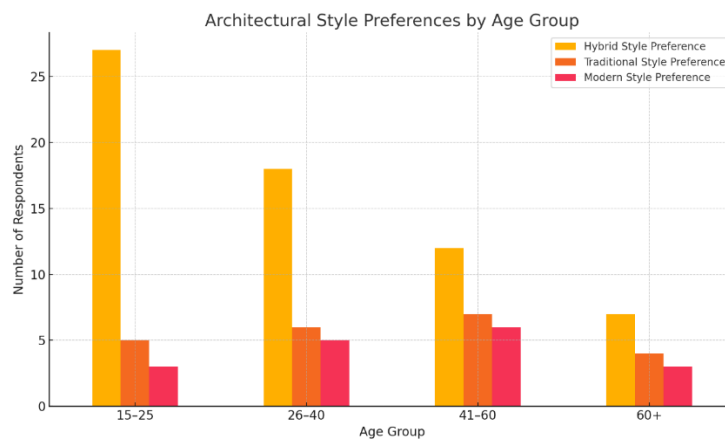


Analysis and Discussion

This section synthesizes and interprets the research findings to explore emerging themes and broader implications. By analyzing the qualitative and observational data from the focus groups, photographic survey, and questionnaire, a pattern of evolving attitudes, behaviors, and spatial practices concerning traditional Bahraini architecture becomes evident.

Public Sentiment and Perception

To visually illustrate these findings, the following chart displays the preferences for hybrid, traditional, and modern architectural styles across different age groups based on the questionnaire responses:



This chart reveals that the hybrid style is overwhelmingly preferred among all age groups, particularly the younger demographic (15–25), with decreasing but consistent interest in hybrid approaches among older participants. This supports the narrative that integration, rather than replacement, of traditional elements is most appealing to the Bahraini public.

The analysis of the focus group data reveals a deep-seated appreciation for traditional architectural features among both younger and older generations. While motivations vary, the outcome converges on a shared sentiment that tradition must be retained—but not replicated. The younger generation perceives traditional design as an aesthetic and sustainable asset that enhances cultural identity, while older participants view it with a sense of emotional and historical attachment. Despite differing perspectives, both groups reject the notion that traditional architecture is obsolete.

This alignment is further supported by questionnaire responses. A significant majority (89%) express a preference for integrating traditional elements into modern buildings. These attitudes suggest that the public does not view tradition and modernity as mutually exclusive. Instead, traditional architecture is valued as a source of cultural continuity and climatic adaptability.

Symbolism and Functionality in Built Form

Photographic analysis and site observation data illustrate how architectural elements like wind towers, courtyards, and mashrabiyas continue to function symbolically and environmentally. In restored areas such as Muharraq, traditional architecture supports active community engagement. Observations during Muharraq Nights reveal how built form and public programming together foster cultural revitalization. Courtyards and alleys are not passive heritage artifacts; they become stages for social interaction and identity expression.

Contrastingly, sites like the Manama Souq district expose the consequences of neglect. Despite decay, public rituals like communal prayer continue to take place in proximity to older structures, indicating that spatial memory persists even in deteriorated contexts. This behavior reflects the ingrained cultural value of traditional architecture, beyond aesthetics or functionality.

Reinterpretation and Youth Engagement

The reinterpretation of traditional architecture by younger Bahrainis introduces a dynamic cultural narrative. This is evident in the example of the abandoned house turned graffiti canvas. Here, heritage is not viewed as fixed or sacred, but as adaptable and expressive. Such acts demonstrate that traditional architecture provides not only a spatial but also an emotional and symbolic framework for personal and collective identity.

Social media also plays a role in reinforcing and reshaping traditional values. Younger focus group participants often reference how old houses and restored spaces are circulated and celebrated on Instagram and TikTok. These platforms become new arenas for cultural storytelling, turning architectural appreciation into a visual and participatory act.

Modern Integration and Architectural Practice

Case studies such as Al Liwan and the RAK Art Foundation exemplify how traditional principles are integrated into modern design. These buildings do not merely reference heritage; they adapt it to current needs. For instance, narrow walkways, inward-facing courtyards, and locally sourced materials reappear in modern typologies, offering both climatic comfort and cultural symbolism.

This adaptive approach to design supports the notion that traditional architecture in Bahrain is evolving. Architects and developers are no longer limited to binary choices between tradition and modernity. Instead, they engage in a process of reinterpretation that aligns with both environmental demands and community expectations. These practices reflect an architectural language that is rooted yet responsive, symbolic yet practical.

Emerging Patterns and Cultural Implications

Across all forms of data, several consistent patterns emerge:

- Traditional architecture is widely recognized as culturally meaningful and environmentally responsive.
- Both generations support hybrid design that incorporates vernacular elements.
- Active engagement with heritage—through restoration, reinterpretation, or social media—is growing.
- Abandoned or deteriorating structures still function as cultural references.

These patterns reflect a broader shift in public and professional discourse. Rather than treating heritage as a static relic, Bahrainis increasingly view it as a living system capable of adaptation. This transformation is especially significant in a country that faces rapid urbanization and globalization. In such a context, the retention of architectural identity becomes both a cultural and environmental necessity.

Discussion of Limitations

While the data reveal strong trends, the study also faces certain limitations. The sample size for the questionnaire is modest (64 participants), and while diverse in age and occupation, it may not represent the entire population. Furthermore, the focus groups, although rich in qualitative data, are limited to two sessions. Broader engagement across different regions of Bahrain could yield even more varied insights.

Despite these limitations, the triangulated approach—combining interviews, observations, and surveys—strengthens the reliability of the findings. The alignment across different data types confirms a coherent narrative: that traditional Bahraini architecture is being revived not just through policy or design, but through collective public will and cultural practice.

Conclusions

This research concludes that traditional Bahraini architecture is not a static remnant of the past but a dynamic cultural resource actively engaged by the public and increasingly integrated into contemporary architectural practices. Through a triangulated qualitative methodology—comprising focus groups, site-based visual analysis, and public questionnaires—this study uncovers a broad and multi-generational appreciation for the symbolic, climatic, and cultural value of traditional architectural elements.

The evidence gathered confirms that both younger and older Bahrainis value the architectural heritage embedded in features like wind towers, internal courtyards, and mashrabiyas. While older participants emphasize lived experience, comfort, and emotional connection, younger participants view traditional design through the lens of sustainability, identity, and aesthetic creativity. Across all groups, the dominant preference is for hybrid architectural styles that integrate traditional elements into modern forms, underscoring a desire for continuity rather than imitation.

The findings also reveal that public engagement with traditional architecture extends beyond sentiment. In spaces like Muharraq, active preservation projects and cultural events revitalize traditional environments, making them centers of social and cultural activity. Meanwhile, reinterpretations such as graffiti on decaying structures and the viral circulation of traditional forms on social media demonstrate how tradition is being reimagined by a new generation.

From a design perspective, this revival translates into a growing movement to adapt vernacular principles to modern needs. Buildings such as Al Liwan and the RAK Art Foundation offer successful examples of architectural fusion—blending symbolic continuity with spatial innovation. These models show that traditional architecture can evolve without losing authenticity, reinforcing the notion that heritage is best preserved not by replication but by adaptation.

This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on architecture and identity by grounding theoretical discussions in empirical, public-centered evidence. It affirms that

traditional Bahraini architecture holds relevance not only as a source of cultural memory but also as a template for sustainable and identity-rich development. Future planning and design initiatives should, therefore, draw from this public sentiment, integrating traditional spatial logics and aesthetics in ways that are both contextually meaningful and forward-looking.

This paper thus concludes that revival of traditional architecture in Bahrain is not simply a design trend. It is a reflection of a society seeking to reconcile its historical roots with contemporary needs. It represents a cultural negotiation that is both spatial and symbolic—preserving the soul of the past while building the framework of the future.

Acknowledgements: This research did not receive any funding. However, the author wishes to acknowledge the academic support received from the university of Bahrain as well as numerous architects, for their unreserved support in carrying out this research.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares that this research does not entail any conflict of interest.

Data Availability: Data used in this research are available for scrutiny if so required. In any case, they have been used in this research with the consent of the owners of that data.

References

- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Fakharany, N. (2025, February 9). Imported modernism: The untold story of Bahrain's 1976 Cultural Centre Competition. ArchDaily.
- Hamousch, M. B. (2007). The metamorphosis of a Gulf city. In Y. Elsheshtawy (Ed.), *The Arab city: Tradition, modernity and urban development* (pp. 119–140). London: Routledge.
- Lombard, P. (2024, June 1). Highlighting Bahrain's ancient heritage. *Arabian Humanities: Revue internationale d'archéologie et de sciences sociales sur la péninsule Arabique*.
- Ministry of Housing. (1999). *Architectural features of traditional cities in Bahrain*. Physical Planning Directorate, Urban and Rural Renewal Section.
- Oliver, P. (1987). *Dwellings: The house across the world*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Proshansky, H. M., Fabian, A. K., & Kaminoff, R. (1983). Place-identity: Physical world socialization of the self. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 3(1), 57–83.
- Rapoport, A. (1969). *House form and culture*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.